

Global Tides

Volume 6

Article 7

5-1-2012

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Recommended Citation

Mogan, Alexandra (2012) "Theodore Roosevelt and the Boone and Crockett Club: The Saving of America's Buffalo," *Global Tides*: Vol. 6, Article 7.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/globaltides/vol6/iss1/7>

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Theodore Roosevelt and the Boone and Crockett Club:

The Saving of America's Buffalo

Alexandra Michelle Mogan

Global Tides

April 4, 2012

Theodore Roosevelt has been labeled one of the leading conservationists of the early twentieth century. During the course of his presidency (1901-1909) Roosevelt established four game reserves, five national parks, and eighteen national monuments.¹ With one swift stroke of his Oval Office pen, Roosevelt preserved almost half the landmass acquired through the Louisiana Purchase.² When scholars discuss Roosevelt's conservationist legacy they focus on his executive actions, leaving his pre-presidential role in conservationism largely forgotten. If Roosevelt had never served as Commander-in-Chief, his name would have still lined the history shelves, due to his important conservation efforts before 1901. The most exceptional of his efforts in the field of conservationism was the establishment of the Boone and Crockett Club in 1887; the Club's significance is most clearly demonstrated in its efforts to preserve the buffalo in Yellowstone National Park.

Before describing the Boone and Crockett Club's monumental impact, I will first establish the background of the Club's founding and the downfall of the American bison. To understand the context of my thesis, it is necessary to begin with the modern scholarly debate analyzing the conservationist legacy of the Club and its founder, Theodore Roosevelt. In Michael L. Collins's work, *That Damned Cowboy*, he points to what he claims is an inconsistency of Roosevelt's conservationist convictions. From Roosevelt's bully pulpit, he condemned the destruction of America's natural resources, yet ironically, he was an avid hunter. Collins cites the example of Roosevelt's hunting trip in 1889, where Roosevelt witnessed the dismal reality of America's once-thriving species of buffalo. Where grass once laid flat from the trampling of bison hooves, their carcasses

¹ Richard Rattenbury, *Hunting the American West: The Pursuit of Big Game for Life, Profit, and Sport, 1800-1900* (Missoula, Mont: Boone and Crockett Club, 2008), 367.

² Douglas Brinkley, *The Wilderness Warrior: Theodore Roosevelt and the Crusade for America* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 19.

stained the landscape.³ Nonetheless, Roosevelt could not resist his inner hunter's urge to take home a buffalo's head as a trophy; however, it would only be a few years later when he would upbraid a poacher for these same actions. Collins dubs Roosevelt as "a bundle of contradictions," unable to reconcile his passion for hunting and preserving. Moreover, Collins accuses Roosevelt's Boone and Crockett Club of abiding by the same paradoxical dogma, its members devote themselves "to saving the very animals that they enjoyed shooting for sport."⁴

In direct contrast to Collins, historian Douglas Brinkley states, "while anti-hunters sat on the sidelines gabbing about the extermination of the buffalo, Roosevelt ... popularized the sportsman's code and called for the protection of buffalo in Yellowstone." Brinkley does not deny the fact that the Boone and Crockett Club's founders were gentlemen hunters, however, he asserts that "none [were] afraid to get mud on [their] boots." Lit by the fire of their convictions, the Boone and Crockett Club members, according to Brinkley, became "the most important lobbying group to promote *all* national parks in the late 1880s."⁵

In his *Saving the Planet*, Hal K. Rothman explains how the Club's elite social standing was used "as a tool of moral suasion in an effort to preserve decimated species." He cites Roosevelt's organization as an influential force that made it its purpose to inform the public of the ethical side to hunting. Rothman indicates that Roosevelt and the Club co-founder George Bird Grinnell took "a jaundiced and decidedly moralistic view" of the exploitation of the West, paying particular attention to the buffalo. The Club leaders were sickened by the use of technology, like huge-muzzled punt guns, for commercial hunting

³ Michael L. Collins, *That Damned Cowboy: Theodore Roosevelt and the American West, 1883-1898* (New York: P. Lang, 1989), 14-17.

⁴ Collins, *That Damned Cowboy*, 98.

⁵ Brinkley, *The Wilderness Warrior*, 203-206.

that led to careless over-hunting of species.⁶ The Club adopted a platform of responsible hunting that, because of its members' high social influence, was effectively promoted to the public.

The historian Richard Rattenbury leaves little room for criticism in his praise of the Club and its leaders. Of the two Club leaders, he states, "Perhaps more than any other men, Grinnell and Roosevelt would prove instrumental in influencing American attitudes about the importance of wildlife preservation, the perpetuation of big-game species, and ethical hunting practice." Moreover, Rattenbury concedes that at first the Club operated out of self-interest, preserving the big game for their fellow elitists. However, he concludes that the members "ultimately expanded their aims and their efforts to include Americans from all walks of life."⁷

It is my argument that the Boone and Crockett Club was the most significant of Roosevelt's conservation legacy. While it may have begun primarily as an elitist group, it quickly became the rallying platform for any American, regardless of social status, concerned with preservation. The very fact that these men were part of the problem, being hunters, strengthened their cause for preservation. They were able to change the problem itself by altering the behavior and conscience of the hunter. The Club promoted a sensible way of hunting that called for hunter responsibility. They believed in achieving a balance of preserving the sport they loved and protecting the wildlife from over-hunting. With a platform of convictions that held a wide appeal, the Club influenced preservation policies that extended far into our modern day legislation.

Let us now proceed to the Club's beginnings; the very day Theodore Roosevelt's conservation legacy spread its wings and took flight. In early December 1887, the

⁶ Hal K. Rothman, *Saving the Planet: The American Response to the Environment in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000), 30.

⁷ Rattenbury, *Hunting of the American West*, 361.

Madison Avenue home of Theodore Roosevelt's sister fluttered with activity paralleling the bustle of the Manhattan streets outside. Roosevelt, who had returned the day before from his ranch in the Badlands, waited to receive his guests.⁸ To the casual observer, it would have appeared merely as another gathering of the New York City aristocratic elite. However, Roosevelt sent his invitations wisely, with a purpose in mind; besides wealth and influence, these men were united by their beliefs in conservation. The men entering the threshold of the Roosevelt home were naturalists and hunters who felt strongly in favor of preservation. Later that evening, when the men stepped outside the door they were members of a club armed with a purpose. Thus, the Boone and Crockett Club was born.

Named after the famous antebellum hunters, Daniel Boone and David Crockett, the Club strove to cultivate the attributes it believed hunting bestowed upon the hunter, namely "energy, resolution, manliness, self-reliance...qualities without which no race can do its life-work well."⁹ They were a group of hunters who upheld a responsible hunting ethos that separated them from the hunters who engaged in the senseless slaughter of animals with no regard to diminishing populations.¹⁰ According to an 1896 *New York Times* article, the Club's aim was not "to glorify their particular prowess," but to impart upon the public its notion that all game animals of the country should be protected from the "ruthless pot hunters,"¹¹ those who hunted with little regard to the rules of hunting.

⁸ Brinkley, *The Wilderness Warrior*, 202.

⁹ Theodore Roosevelt and George Bird Grinnell, *American Big-Game Hunting: The Book of the Boone and Crockett Club* (New York: Forest and Stream Pub. Co., 1901), 14-15.

¹⁰ Ibid., 13-14

¹¹ "New Publications: Hunters of Big Game," *New York Times* (1857-1922), February 29, 1896, <http://www.proquest.com.lib.pepperdine.edu>

With its permanent membership of one hundred hunters and fifty associate members, membership was “highly prized,” according to one *New York Times* article.¹² In order to be eligible, a prospective member had to have shot at least three varieties of North American big game with a rifle in a fair chase.¹³ Torch hunting and hunting game while caught in deep snow or while swimming in water were deemed illegitimate methods of hunting.¹⁴ Roosevelt, who served as the Club’s president until 1894, fulfilled the fledgling club’s need for public influence, filling the associate memberships with many powerful people: writers such as Owen Wister and Henry Cabot Lodge; army generals, such as William T. Sherman and Philip H. Sheridan; a former secretary of the interior, Carl Shurz; along with prominent geologists, artists, politicians, industrialists. The members constituted a powerful coalition of conservationists united by their love for hunting and nature.¹⁵ These early connections would prove to be vital for the Club’s saving of the American buffalo.

At Roosevelt’s side was Club co-founder, George Bird Grinnell; Grinnell was the creator of the Audubon society and editor of the periodical, *Forest and Stream*, who would later earn the title, “father of modern conservationism” because of his impressive conservationist legacy.¹⁶ It was Grinnell’s connection with *Forest and Stream* that would serve as the significant voice of the Club during its later lobbying efforts for wildlife protection in Yellowstone National Park. Both men’s talents orchestrated the symphony of what one newspaper described as “the representative big-game sportsmen’s club of America.”¹⁷ While Grinnell was “the formulator and purveyor of conservation thought

¹² “The Week in the Club World,” *New York Times* (1857-1922), January 2, 1898, <http://www.proquest.com/lib.pepperdine.edu>

¹³ Brinkley, *The Wilderness Warrior*, 204.

¹⁴ Roosevelt and Grinnell, *American Big Game Hunting*, 113-14.

¹⁵ Brinkley, *The Wilderness Warrior*, 203.

¹⁶ Rattenbury, *Hunting of the American West*, 370.

¹⁷ “The Week in the Club World.”

and philosophy,” Roosevelt was “the initiator and administrator of conservation policy.”¹⁸ One *New York Times* article described the two leaders as, “hunters and naturalists, men who kill big game, and yet all merciful, with an eye too to nature...Roosevelt and Grinnell are the best examples of the true American sportsman.”¹⁹ Steering the helm of their new organization, the dynamic duo provided the Club with the proper soil from which to plant its seeds.

The first seed to be planted was the Club’s mission statement. In a nine-article constitution, the Club formalized its beliefs. Its principal objectives were: “the preservation of exploration, recording of observations of natural history of wild animals, and promotion of manly sport with the rifle.”²⁰ As noted, there are some, like Michael L. Collins, who are skeptical of Roosevelt and the Club’s seeming “bundle of contradictions.” Even during Roosevelt’s lifetime there existed some skepticism regarding the Club’s intentions. But Roosevelt dismissed these criticisms with this statement he made in *Outdoor Pastimes of an American Hunter*: “People who protest against hunting, and consider sportsmen the enemies of wildlife, are ignorant of the fact that in reality the genuine sportsman is by all odds the most important factor in keeping the larger and more valuable wild creatures from total extermination.”²¹

Lobbying for preservationist legislation was not a new concept during the late nineteenth century. In fact, Grinnell cites the New York Association for the Protection of Game founded 1844, as the “first active step” to lobbying for preservation efforts. For the first time, an organization encapsulated the disconnected voices calling for game

¹⁸ Rattenbury, *Hunting of the American West*, 361.

¹⁹ “Wild Animals of the Far West: American Big-Game Hunting. The Book of the Boone and Crockett Club,” *New York Times* (1857-1922), December 17, 1893, <http://www.proquest.com.lib.pepperdine.edu>.

²⁰ M., C. H. 1896. "Hunting in Many Lands—The Book of the Boone and Crockett Club." *Science*. 3, no. 59: 246-246.

²¹ Rattenbury, *Hunting of the American West*, 370.

protection and united them under one public voice that worked with the New York State Legislature. However, the voices that the New York Association represented were few in number; the general public maintained either an apathetic and or skeptical viewpoint of any preservation advocacy that might encroach upon their rights. Many viewed game reserves as merely playgrounds for the wealthy sportsmen. It was not until the 1870s, with the advent of hunting journals and nature periodicals, that articles informed the public of America's natural resources and made some recognize the national importance for conservation. With the popularity of these publications, newspapers began to hitch a ride on the escalating trend of conservationism, increasing the flow of information to the public.²²

By the time of the Boone and Crockett Club's conception, the pump had been primed, and the public's ears had begun to open. Books published by *Forest and Stream* assisted in carrying the Club's convictions to the public arena. From a blood-pumping narrative of bear hunting in the Sierras to a nostalgic yarn of the roaming buffalo herds, members' essays were consolidated into several Club publications throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These writings were made available to anyone, from wilderness enthusiasts to expansionist politicians, who desired to know more about wildlife. Furthermore, knowledge acquired from explorations made by the Club members appeared in periodicals and government reports.²³ In fact, 480 copies of their 1904 publication, *American Big Game and its Haunts*, were sent to many senators and congressmen and one hundred more to game officials all around the country.²⁴

²² George Bird Grinnell and Charles Sheldon, *Hunting and Conservation; The Book of the Boone and Crockett Club* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1925), 222-6.

²³ Roosevelt and Grinnell, *American Big Game Hunting*, 10.

²⁴ Rattenbury, *Hunting of the American West*, 369.

Literary critics positively sang about these publications. One reviewer praised the Club's *Hunting in Many Lands*, claiming it was "incomparably the best book ever written on the large animals of America... [it is] well gotten up, entertainingly written, and abounds in all facts of interest to the naturalist."²⁵ Another book critic wrote, "Such a club should have the best wishes and the support of every sportsman in the United States."²⁶ In my research, I found no evidence of negative criticism of the Club's publications. I conclude that if any had existed, they were easily outweighed by the magnitude of the soaring praises. With the high acclaims of literary critics, the Club's convictions echoed all the way to Washington D.C., the battleground where they would launch their lobbying efforts.

It was one thing to publish ideas; it was another to make them real. In order to change legislation, the Club needed to have members that could aid in the lobbying effort. When Roosevelt solicited prospective club members, he did so with a specific strategy. From the very moment of the Club's conception, Roosevelt recognized the need for significant financial backing that would enable effective lobbying in Washington. This is why many founding members were "New York capitalists with deep pockets."²⁷ Moreover, as previously mentioned, the Club included members of national importance, from senators to credited geologists. Armed with publications, connections and monetary resources, the Boone and Crockett Club was locked and loaded for one of its first lobbying efforts.

In 1891, working with the newly established Division of Forestry of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Grinnell and other Club members lobbied for the "sensible

²⁵ M., C. H. 1896. "Hunting in Many Lands--The Book of the Boone and Crockett Club." *Science*. 3, no. 59: 246-246.

²⁶ "Wild Animals of the Far West."

²⁷ Brinkley, *The Wilderness Warrior*, 202.

management of the woodlands,” which led to the Forest Reserve Act of 1891.²⁸ This enabled the President to set aside land as a forest reserve by executive order—a tool Theodore Roosevelt would frequently use as President. The Boone and Crockett Club believed that preservation of forest and of game went hand in hand. They considered reservations “nurseries and breeding grounds of game ... which are elsewhere inevitably exterminated by the march of settlement.”²⁹ In its first volume, *American Big Game Hunting*, published in 1893, the Club called for the establishment of game refuges in places where hunting threatened to wipe out wild game population. If game preservation laws were not enforced, the “work of butchery” and “short-sided slaughter” that the Club so staunchly resented would persist.³⁰ In his 1925 essay, “Game Protection,” Grinnell insisted that the Club “originated the idea of established game refuges” and defined it as an animal sanctuary free from the “molestation of man.”³¹ Yet by the late 1980s, the serenity of these reserves would become broken by the arrival of greedy poachers.

Nowhere did the storm clouds gather more than in Yellowstone National Park, where big game remained vulnerable to poaching. In this so-called reserve, the bison, an American frontier icon, was clinging to survival by a single thread. In order to acquire a true sense of how instrumental the Boone and Crockett Club was in rescuing the buffalo in Yellowstone, it is necessary to illustrate how perilously close the American buffalo came to falling into the abyss of extinction. Let us first travel to the prosperous era of the bison when herds blackened the green valleys and the ground quaked with their thundering hooves. It is estimated that 30 million bison once roamed two-thirds of North

²⁸ Rattenbury, *Hunting the American West*, 366.

²⁹ Roosevelt and Grinnell, *American Big Game Hunting*, 11.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 218.

³¹ Grinnell and Sheldon, *Hunting and Conservation*, 218.

America.³² There was such a multitude of bison that an Indian once observed that “the country was one robe.” In 1870, there were 7 million bison dwelling on the Great Plains and Rocky Mountains.³³ No one could have suspected that by the late nineteenth century this thriving species would soon be facing extinction.

Ironically, those who relied on these roaming species, namely the Native American tribes, played a hand in the buffalo’s initial demise. The Native American people viewed the buffalo as their “staff of life,” using every part of the animal for their every need; they used its hair for pillow stuffing, skin for moccasins, and bones for sleds.³⁴ However, their “staff of life” became broken when, in the mid 19th century, tribes began hunting the buffalo in exchange for goods from white traders.³⁵ It is estimated that in the late 1860s and early 70s, the Indians traded 25,000 to 40,000 robes annually to traders in the Dakota and Montana territories alone.³⁶ The Native American people used to hunt what was necessary for their survival, but now in addition to sustaining their own tribes, they were supplying the traders’ growing demands for buffalo hides.

The extermination of the buffalo advanced with the debut of the Transcontinental railroad in 1869 as the East gained greater access to the rich resources of the West. Suddenly, the industrialized world clashed with the frontier as it easily chugged across a landscape once deemed the “Great American Desert.” Soon the whistle of the locomotive sounded through the home of the buffalo as the industrialized East came into contact with the emblem of the untamed West. As the chain gangs clanked their way through the heartland, railroad contractors hired hunters to kill buffalo to feed the hungry workers. Once the final spikes were pounded in, passengers climbed aboard the iron horse and

³² Jon Cates. *Home on the Range: The Story of the National Bison Range*, (Helena, Mont: Falcon Press, 1986), 11.

³³ Rattenbury, *Hunting of the American West*, 202.

³⁴ Roosevelt and Grinnell, *American Big Game Hunting*, 179-80.

³⁵ Rattenbury, *Hunting of the American West*, 163.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 164

took off for the West, bringing about even more confrontations with the bison. These encounters between machine and nature were far from harmonious. The railroads quickly learned that forcing their locomotives through bison herds would result in the cars being derailed. A railroad passenger once spoke of being detained for three hours because a bison herd was crossing the tracks.

The native tribes' role as primary suppliers in the plains ended in the 1870s with the arrival of Anglo-American buffalo-hide hunters. It was at this time that the bloodbath really began. Soon only the "very choicest parts," like the tongue, were chosen, leaving "four-fifths of the really edible portion ... left for the wolves."³⁷ In 1871, tanneries in Germany, Britain, and America learned how to convert the buffalo hides into leather, transforming the seasonal hunt into a "year-round slaughter for hides."³⁸

Furthermore, with the arrival of the Union Pacific and then Kansas Pacific lines, the bison were split into two main herds, one in the north and one in the south.³⁹ By 1876, the southern bison herd was exterminated, leaving the northern herd to struggle against increasing odds.⁴⁰ It was between the years 1880 and 1883 that the American buffalo faced the threat of absolute extinction as hunters turned their scopes on the straggling northern herds. A Montana rancher, Granville Stuart, described the carnage in 1880:

The bottoms are sprinkled with the carcasses of dead buffalo. In many places they lie thick on the ground, fat and meat not yet spoiled, all murdered for their hides

³⁷ Rattenbury, *Hunting of the American West*, 179.

³⁸ Ibid., 189.

³⁹ Grinnell and Sheldon, *Hunting and Conservation*, 215.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 360.

which are piled like cord wood all along the way. Tis' an awful sight. Such a waste of the finest meat in the world! ⁴¹

In 1881, the Northern Pacific railroad arrived in Miles city, Montana and established a shipping point for hunters in the region near Yellowstone National Park. When hunting outfits traveled across the Montana plains in 1883, they did not see a single buffalo herd. ⁴² By 1883, the northern herd was reduced to less than 300 bison, with 200 in Yellowstone. ⁴³ After a half a century of American westward growth, the bison were being pushed out of the western scene entirely. At this point America faced an ultimatum: do something to protect the bison or allow a symbol of American heritage to vanish forever. After a long battle, the Boone and Crockett Club's lobbying efforts would achieve the passage of the Yellowstone Preservation Act of 1894 and thus save the buffalo from extinction. But the Club's ultimate victory of the Yellowstone Preservation Act would not be accomplished until after nearly a decade of struggle.

Before the Forest Reserve Act of 1891 and the cardinal preservation legislation, the Yellowstone Preservation Act of 1894, there were some attempts at preservation. In 1874, a bill to protect the buffalo passed the unenthusiastic Congress but died on President Grant's desk. At this time, the War and the Interior departments associated the silence of the plain with the ceasing of the Indian drum. If there were no buffalo, the fire of the fighting Indians would extinguish. One *New York Times* article, written in 1921, reflected how perilously close the bison came to annihilation at this point. It depicts Americans as "squandering ... resources like drunken sailors," believing the supply was unlimited. It holds the apathetic government responsible, stating, "Congress could have

⁴¹ Rattenbury, *Hunting of the American West*, 189.

⁴² Cates, *Home on the Range*, 11.

⁴³ "Bison Timeline," American Bison Society, <http://www.americanbisonsocietyonline.org/AboutUs/Timeline/tabid/308/ctl/Terms/Default.aspx> (accessed December 11, 2011).

preserved the bison in its natural state, but it didn't—the pot hunters were too strong for Congress.”⁴⁴ Ironically, the need for wildlife protective legislation was most evident in America's first national park, Yellowstone. Battling the greedy skin hunters, the buffalo's last stand would be in this natural wonderland. It was in this battle that the Boone and Crockett club would launch its most significant lobbying campaign, resulting in the monumental Yellowstone Protection act.

Upon his visit to the Park in 1871, Dr. F. V. Hayden recognized a need to preserve the scientific wonderland of Yellowstone from vandalism and exploitation. His argument was so persuasive that the bill he lobbied for passed the House with no opposition.⁴⁵ One year later, the United States possessed its first national park. Congress saw no need for protection measures other than defining the boundaries of the Park and charging the Department of the Interior with its safe-keeping.⁴⁶ Still untouched by the Northern Pacific line, the Park remained a place that was remote and inaccessible to the general public. As the lumbermen and railway tie-cutters, symbols of the encroaching civilization, pressed toward the remaining haunts of the game, Yellowstone increased in its importance as a wildlife refuge.⁴⁷

However, by about 1878, the peacefulness of this sanctuary began to crumble as the number of visitors increased. As visitors began to enter Yellowstone's gates, the skin and record hunter also broke into the refuge.⁴⁸ At this time, the nation was not cognizant of the peril the game in the Park faced. The problem remained a localized Western issue. It was a problem, Easterners believed, that stemmed inherently from the natural

⁴⁴ “A Real Buffalo Herd.” *New York Times* (1857-1922), January 30, 1921, <http://www.proquest.com/lib.pepperdine.edu>.

⁴⁵ Roosevelt and Grinnell, *American Big Game Hunting*, 240-1.

⁴⁶ Theodore Roosevelt and George Bird Grinnell, *Hunting in Many Lands* (New York: Forest and Stream Publishing Co., 1895), 405.

⁴⁷ Roosevelt and Grinnell, *American Big Game Hunting*, 244.

⁴⁸ Roosevelt and Grinnell, *Hunting in Many Lands*, 405.

unruliness of the West and its inhabitants. Indeed, the problem Park officials had to contend with was not sportsman hunters from the East Coast, but a local population of hunters who hunted for survival. Superintendent Colonel Anderson attributed the gradual settling along the Park border as a “one of the greatest annoyances” he had to deal with, for there now existed “a population whose sole subsistence is derived from hunting and trapping.”⁴⁹ Their condemnation of what locals viewed as subsistence hunting made their actions resented as an abuse of government power. One Wyoming resident declared, “When you say to a ranchman, ‘You can’t eat game, except in season,’ you make him a poacher ... More than one family [here] would almost starve for the game.”⁵⁰

It was evident that lack of popular support for wildlife protective measures was in fact a regional issue. Locals believed that what Eastern conservationist organizations naively perceived as slaughter was in actuality the struggle to survive in the difficult Western environment. Until the capture of the infamous poacher Ed Howell, those in the frontier felt an allegiance to the so-called poachers, who they assumed were merely exercising their natural right to subsistence, a concept that was apparently foreign to the Eastern hunters who mostly engaged in leisure sport hunting. Little did the locals know that the poachers were taking advantage of these sentiments and continuing their senseless waste of Westerners’ natural resources. The Boone and Crockett Club’s publications, though informative, only influenced those who already had a desire for wildlife conservationism. The majority of Americans remained indifferent to the Club’s push for Park wildlife legislation. They shared Congress’ assumption that establishing a National Park sufficed as a viable effort at conservationism. Thus in the early 1890s, only Eastern hunting groups like the Boone and Crockett Club saw the desperate situation of

⁴⁹ Karl Jacoby, *Crimes against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 121.

⁵⁰ Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature*, 122.

Park wildlife and were petitioning Congress to invoke a wildlife Park protection law. But if change was to be made in Congress, it was going to have to be by national consent.

Perhaps to appease a small, pestering group of activists, Congress sent troops to protect the Park in 1883, leaving the role of superintendent to the army commander.⁵¹ Colonel Anderson, superintendent in 1891, admitted that while protection of wildlife had increased, there was only so much that Park officials could do legally. Due to a lack of enforcement laws, the superintendents of the Park were powerless to stop the poaching. Colonel Anderson remarked how past administrators did nothing of value; in his essay in Boone and Crockett's *Hunting in Many Lands*, he tells of one superintendent whose Park reports were "largely made up of lists of the distinguished visitors by whose handshake he was anointed."⁵² Moreover, some locals expressed their contempt for what they perceived as the army official's heavy-handedness by protecting the poachers from capture.⁵³ This further undermined Park officials' attempts at wildlife protection. Taking matters into their own hands, concerned superintendents like Anderson used scouts to find the poachers and bring them back to headquarters. However, all the superintendents could legally do was to confiscate the poachers' property and then turn them loose. This, of course, was not a debilitating loss to the poachers, who could easily restock their supplies. The amount of confiscated materials Colonel Anderson acquired was so great that there was no longer room to store it and he had to begin burning them in a great bonfire.⁵⁴ Facing no legal repercussions, poachers saw no deterrent to the money buffalo heads and scalps fetched in the market.

⁵¹ Roosevelt and Grinnell, *Hunting in Many Lands* 406.

⁵² Roosevelt and Grinnell, *Hunting in Many Lands*, 382.

⁵³ Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature*, 123.

⁵⁴ Roosevelt and Grinnell, *Hunting in Many Lands*, 394-5.

Shortly after its founding in 1887, the Boone and Crockett Club entered the fight by demanding protective legislation. Armed with connections with prominent members of Congress as well as with writers in *Forest and Stream*, members of the Club framed and lobbied for a bill that gave the Park the protections it needed. A Club ally, Senator George Vest of Missouri, repeatedly introduced the bill, which was rejected by an apathetic Congress which felt the establishment of a national park sufficed. Soon, powerful railroad lobbyists, who desired to gain a right-of-way through the Park to the mining camps on the northern border, began to attach their measure along with the proposed protection bill. Those who opposed the railroad, “notably the members of the Boone and Crockett club” appeared before the Public Lands Committee to argue against it, but were written off as “sentimentalists who impeded material progress.”⁵⁵ The railroad lobbyists’ felt that those who desperately wanted the bill passed would consent to the bill carrying a railroad rather than no protective legislation at all. But as the Boone and Crockett Club stated, “Friends of the bill recognized that it was wiser to leave the Park unprotected ... once the railroads were allowed within the Park, it would be a reservation only in name, and that before long the forests and the game would disappear.”⁵⁶

With little public support and with powerful railroad lobbyists as opponents, the Club’s efforts to establish protection in the Park remained at a frustrating standstill. An article from the *Wichita Daily Eagle* expressed the dismal circumstance Yellowstone Park faced by the 1890’s: “If enough members of Congress cannot be interested it looks as if the American people will soon cease to be the possessors of a tract of which the

⁵⁵ Roosevelt and Grinnell, *Hunting in Many Lands* 406-8.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 407.

value is beyond estimate.”⁵⁷ By this time it was evident that the Boone and Crockett Club needed something more than just allies in Congress; it needed the backing of the American people. Yet Westerners’ resentment of what they perceived as Easterners’ attempts at control and Easterners’ indifference of what they saw as a Western problem made both lose sight of the real issue: America was on the brink of losing its bison. What the Club needed was powerful evidence that would stun both the East and West into action, something that would bridge the regional distance and make Park wildlife protection a national issue. It was not until 1894 that a defining moment in Yellowstone National Park opened the public’s ears and consequently altered Congress’ nonchalant attitude to the Boone and Crockett Club’s lobbying.

On March 11, 1894, a Park scout, Felix Burgess, stepped out into the tempestuous, winter weather. After a briefing with superintendent Colonel Anderson, Burgess was sent on a mission to track down an infamous poacher who had disappeared for some time, alarming the Park administrator. The poacher was a man named Edgar Howell, known as “a desperate criminal with a rifle” from the near mining town, Cooke City. Howell had slinked past the Park headquarters and built a lodge where the buffalo had bedded down for the winter. Exemplifying the opposite of fair chase, Howell glided around on his skis, gunning down the buffalo trapped in the deep snow, “slaughtering them as easily if they had been cattle in a corral.”⁵⁸ Burgess soon found the poacher’s tracks and followed them to a cache of six buffalo heads hanging from a tree. Six shots cracked through the winter air, and this time, the hunter would become the hunted. Burgess, also on skis, hurried to the top of the hill and spied Howell busy with the

⁵⁷ “To Wipe It Out,” *The Wichita Daily Eagle* (1890-1906), June 07, 1894, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82014635/1894-06-07/ed-1/seq-6/>

⁵⁸ Roosevelt and Grinnell, *Hunting in Many Lands*, 412-13.

victims of his six shots. Ignoring the obvious danger, Burgess took advantage of the poacher's distraction and got close enough behind him to make the capture before Howell could reach his gun. Burgess brought the poacher back to headquarters, yet as soon as the Secretary of the Interior was aware of the arrest, he ordered Howell's immediate release for there was no law that allowed detainment or any form of punishment. It appeared that this vicious cycle of poaching in the Park would continue, each time with fewer buffalo for the Park officials to protect.⁵⁹

This time, however, was different. Instead of remaining local, the news of Howell's crime went national. Not only was this the first time that a poacher had been caught in the act, but also Emerson Hough, a correspondent for *Forest and Stream*, just happened to be visiting the Park at the time of Howell's arrest. He telegraphed his editor, George Bird Grinnell, with the news, and with the aid of Grinnell's Boone and Crockett Club, the event became nationally publicized. The following morning, Grinnell boarded a train for Washington to remount the Boone and Crockett Club's lobbying efforts.⁶⁰ This was the evidence that the Boone and Crockett Club had needed for all those years in order to hammer through their measure for the protection of the bison. As Grinnell declared in a *Forest and Stream* editorial, "the time has come to sound a call which shall awaken anew public interest."⁶¹ This was the missing link whose potency would make those in Congress, and the American public, regard the bill as legitimately needed.

Once more, *Forest and Stream* served as the Boone and Crockett Club's voice to the public. In the March 24 edition of *Forest and Stream*, Grinnell broke the story of

⁵⁹Michael Punke, *Last Stand: George Bird Grinnell, the Battle to Save the Buffalo, and the Birth of the New West* (New York: Smithsonian Books/Collins, 2007), 206-210.

⁶⁰Punke, *Last Stand*, 210.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 211.

Howell's capture.⁶² Now, the public was informed by *Forest and Stream* of this "most ragged, dirty, and unkempt looking citizen" that had not only destroyed property belonging to the government, but most importantly, "to the people."⁶³ *Forest and Stream* (and thus the Boone and Crockett Club) brilliantly made their fight for Park wildlife legislation the American people's fight. It was not just the government's natural "Wonderland" that had been violated; the poacher's bullet was a stab in the heart of every American citizen. *Forest and Stream* reminded the American citizens that "so long as these lewd fellows of the baser sort ... know they will not be punished ... ten regiments of troops could not protect [the Park] against their raids."⁶⁴ Throughout the following weeks, *Forest and Stream* released a steady flow of commentary about Howell's arrest and the absolute necessity for Park protection. Grinnell called upon every *Forest and Stream* subscriber to "write his Senator and Representative in Congress, asking them to take an active interest in the protection of the Park."⁶⁵ If words were not enough, photos of Howell's plunder taken by wilderness photographer F. Jay Haynes further fueled public outrage.⁶⁶ For the first time, Americans nationwide could witness, and thus, connect personally with the problem that had been plaguing their national park.

The most evident indicator of the public's shift from indifference to activism, informed largely by the Boone and Crockett's Club's writings, was demonstrated in the reaction of the Park's locals. Indeed, there were still those who maintained that poaching was really subsistence hunting; some even admired Howell for his courage for venturing out in such treacherous winter conditions. But now there was a large majority who deemed Howell's killing of rare animals a disgusting crime worthy of legal punishment.

⁶² Ibid., 212.

⁶³ Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature*, 128.

⁶⁴ Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature*, 124.

⁶⁵ Punke, *Last Stand*, 214.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

It did not help that Howell, enjoying his notoriety as the “National Park Poacher,” boasted to *Forest and Stream* of the methods poachers used to evade Park patrols when hunting elk, declaring it as the “simplest thing in the world.”⁶⁷ Local newspapers began to declare Howell’s acts abominable. *Livingston Enterprise* declared that Howell “will find no apologists in this section...for his nefarious work.”⁶⁸ Most significantly, the article made clear that the Boone and Crockett Club’s proposed legislation would now receive support in the West by declaring, “The sentiment here is universal that the small remnant of American bison still in the Park should be protected by rigid laws to prevent their extermination at the hands of poachers whose only object is to secure the valuable consideration offered for their scalps and hides.”⁶⁹

Locals once hostile to preservation efforts now became eagerly cooperative. Soon Park officials began to receive notes from anonymous local sources that informed them of threats to Yellowstone’s wildlife. One note signed “A Friend to the Buffalo” reassured the Park authorities, “I will drop you a few lines as a favor for the Buffalos as they are about extinct” and told of the capture of several buffalo calves in the Park.⁷⁰ Finally, the West and East had become united in their acknowledgment of the need for protective conservationist legislation in America’s first national park. The Boone and Crockett Club’s cause had gone national. Its efforts were no longer just supported by wildlife enthusiasts; it now gained the overwhelming backing by the American people. The ache of injustice had found a spot in the hearts of American citizens and now they demanded governmental action.

⁶⁷ Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature*, 127.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁶⁹ Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature*, 126.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 127.

With successful publicizing of Howell's arrest and crime, the Boone and Crockett Club recognized the opportunity to remount its lobbying efforts for a protective measure for the Park. The Boone and Crockett Club again drafted amendments that were readily taken up by Club member on the Committee on Public Lands, Congressman John F. Lacey of Iowa, who presented it to the House of Representatives. Connections initially established by Roosevelt played a crucial role as members of the House came to the Club's aid.⁷¹ While presenting its recommendation, the subcommittee used the fresh, irrefutable evidence of Howell's infamous slaughter and reminded the House representatives that the time for legislation was now because only "a few days ago poachers entered the park and commenced the slaughter of these animals ... Prompt action is necessary or the last remaining herd of buffalo will be destroyed...."⁷² Before the troublesome railroad lobbyists had time to react, the House passed the bill. In the Senate, the bill was "among its [the Club's] friends," including Senator Vest, another Boone and Crockett Club member, who served as the final driving force behind the passage of the bill.⁷³ Theodore Roosevelt, who was serving as a Civil Service Commissioner, also joined the battle on Capital Hill by providing formal Senate testimony in support of the Park protection legislation.⁷⁴ Now armed with hard evidence and national outrage, these powerful Boone and Crockett Club members and allies held Congress accountable for the passing of Park enforcement legislation. If a poacher slaughtered any more of America's bison, the stain would now be on Congress' hands.

⁷¹ Roosevelt and Grinnell, *Hunting in Many Lands*, 415-16.

⁷² Richard A. Barlett, *Yellowstone: A Wilderness Beseiged* (Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1988), 321.

⁷³ Grinnell and Roosevelt, *Hunting in Many Lands*, 416.

⁷⁴ Punke, *Last Stand*, 214-15.

On May 7, 1894, the National Park Protective Act, also known as the Lacey Act or National Park Protection Act, became law.⁷⁵ It was not coincidental that the Act, which had failed passage several times, now took less than sixty days to be signed into law by President Grover Cleveland.⁷⁶ As Superintendent Colonel Anderson rightly noted, “In one sense it [Howell’s crime] was the most fortunate thing that ever happened in the Park, for it was surely the means of securing a law so much needed and so long striven for.”⁷⁷ If Howell’s grotesque crime created the ideal opportunity for wildlife legislation to be nationally supported, it was the Boone and Crockett Club that took advantage of this momentum and hammered through their drafted bill that protected the nation’s wildlife in Yellowstone National Park. America’s bison population was now on the road to recovery.

The Yellowstone National Park Protection Act became the “foundation for wildlife policy followed by the National Park Service for decades after.”⁷⁸ The Act provided the legal framework that had been absent in the Park. Any violation of a rule or regulation of the Secretary of the Interior was a misdemeanor. Unlawful killing of game or the transportation of game became unconditionally prohibited. Violation of the Act resulted in a fine or imprisonment. Moreover, officials were authorized to continue confiscating the poachers’ materials and means of transportation. Most significantly, a local magistrate was appointed with jurisdiction to try all offenders who violated the law of the Park. As Rattenbury states, for the first time in America’s history, the federal government was “brought into the wildlife-conservation arena.”⁷⁹ To the delight of those who fought for Park protection, the first person to be tried and convicted was Howell,

⁷⁵ Grinnell and Roosevelt, *Hunting in Many Lands*, 405-16.

⁷⁶ Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature*, 126.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Thomas Raymond Wellock. *Preserving the Nation: The Conservation and Environmental Movements, 1870-2000* (Wheeling, Ill: Harlan Davidson, Inc, 2007), 48.

⁷⁹ Rattenbury, *Hunting of the American West*, 367.

who had returned to the Park to hunt buffalo after the law's passage.⁸⁰ Superintendent Colonel Anderson still had to battle poachers in the Park, but now he was empowered by the knowledge that he could legally prosecute them. Knowing he had the law on his side, Anderson initiated a full-scale campaign against what he deemed as "the worst and most daring and desperate gang of poachers who ever defied the park laws and the vigilance of the authorities."⁸¹

Newspapers provide the clearest evidence of the crucial role the Boone and Crockett Club played in the establishment of the Protective Act. One journalist of the *New York Times* wrote, "It is much due to this club as any other association, that at last an act was passed by Congress." It later went on to report that Park game was beginning to make a come-back: "There is now an abundance of elk and deer, and some buffalo...."⁸² An article written in 1924 listed the Boone and Crockett Club as one of the key organizations that during the last half century "furnished a text that was properly exploited and that did much to bring home to the public the need of purely prohibitive measures."⁸³ Another article labeled Grinnell "the most valiant champion game ever had" and praised his work to pass the measure in 1894 as having set the "foundation ... for a system of game preservation in national parks."⁸⁴

The Park Protective Act did more than establish a precedent for today's national park system, it saved the buffalo from extinction. If it were not for the Boone and Crockett Club's persistent advocacy for protective legislation, it would have taken the government much longer to draft a bill and get it passed. A prime example of how

⁸⁰ Ibid., 416.

⁸¹ Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature*, 130.

⁸² "New Publications: Hunters of Big Game"

⁸³ "Constructive Conservation of Game," *New York Times* (1923-current file), December 8, 1924, <http://www.proquest.com.lib.pepperdine.edu>

⁸⁴ "Wild Life in the National Parks," *New York Times* (1923-current file), April 20, 1925, <http://www.proquest.com.lib.pepperdine.edu>

important the Act was to the preservation of buffalo is found in hunter-naturalist Dwight Huntington's comparison of the game in Yellowstone to the neighboring Big Horn Mountain Region. He illustrated how the Big Horn region was once a home of large game, yet ten years after he observed it as a thriving area it was, as he described it, "shot out." Game outside the Park and not under the safety of the Protection Act was completely wiped out. He concluded, "The necessity of game preservation is nowhere more evident than in the Big Horns."⁸⁵

With the Act of 1894, the public expressed increased concern for the protection of bison as people recognized their sentimental value and importance to the country. In 1907, one news article proclaimed that the extinction of the "famous old buffalo" would be a "national disgrace and calamity."⁸⁶ A few years later, another journalist stated, "there is a sentimental value in [the bison's] preservation. It is the most conspicuous of the American fauna."⁸⁷ Even up to our twenty-first century, there remains a widespread sentimentality for America's bison and a concern for its protection.

The Boone and Crockett Club did not end its march after its success in 1894. In 1899, the New York Zoological Society, begun by members of the Club, opened the Bronx Zoological Park. The new zoo housed all kinds of wildlife from reptiles to birds of paradise.⁸⁸ Most significantly, the Bronx Zoo possessed seven bison whose numbers soon multiplied enough for the zoo to donate some to herds in other reserves. In 1907, the Wichita Game Preserve received fifteen bison from the forty-five thriving at the zoo.⁸⁹ Moreover, in 1905, zoo director William P. Hornaday established the American Bison

⁸⁵ Rattenbury, *Hunting of the American West*, 367.

⁸⁶ "Bison Preserves," *New York Times* (1857-1922), November 3, 1907, <http://www.proquest.com.lib.pepperdine.edu>

⁸⁷ "The Saving of the Bison," *New York Times* (1857-1922), April 28, 1912, <http://www.proquest.com.lib.pepperdine.edu>

⁸⁸ "Bronx Zoo Rounds Out the 25-Year Mark," *New York Times* (1923-current file), November 9, 1924, <http://www.proquest.com.lib.pepperdine.edu>

⁸⁹ "Bison Preserves."

Society, which later donated a nucleus herd of thirty-seven bison to the National Bison Range created by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1908. About a decade later, there were more than five hundred bison on the Range.

In the Club's 1924 publication, *Hunting and Conservation*, Grinnell triumphantly noted how "at the beginning of the century there were supposed to be only twenty or twenty-five buffalo," yet because of game protection measures, the bison have "considerably increased" and "give promise of surviving in a wild state." All the bison except for two small wild bands were under control. One of these wild herds was made up of 125 descendants of the bison that escaped the poaching prevalent in Yellowstone until 1894.⁹⁰ Between the years 1902 and 1903, private owners donated a total of twenty-one buffalo to the Park. In 1905, this herd increased to forty-four. In 1911, it was up to 147. And despite a few outbreaks of diseases, in 1917 the herd numbered 330.⁹¹ According to a census taken January 1, 1923, the estimated total of bison in captivity (excluding the wild herds in Yellowstone) reached 3,753.⁹² Though the buffalo will never again reign over the frontier, their welfare has continued to remain important to the American people. In a 2002 census, more than 232,000 bison were in private herds in the U.S.⁹³

Throughout the 20th century, the Boone and Crockett Club remained a prominent voice in preservation of American wildlife. In its Game Preservation Report of 1912, the Club charged that game laws "lacked the elements of elasticity and quick adaptability to rapidly changing conditions," such as population increase, better weaponry, and swifter transportation. Furthermore, it called for commissions for the preservation of game to

⁹⁰ Grinnell and Sheldon, *Hunting and Conservation*, 357.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 394.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 411.

⁹³ "Bison Timeline," American Bison Society.

possess the power to alter the hunting seasons and adjust the bag limits. Consequently, certain state legislatures from East to West followed these suggestions.⁹⁴ The Club's continuing influence upon the public is evident in a 1924 news article that calls for more game refuges and stricter enforcement of existing laws. It concludes by echoing the Boone and Crockett philosophy: "The purpose is to preserve the game supply. The ideal is to do this by methods which are flexible enough to insure adequate protection without depriving the sportsman of his legitimate avocation."⁹⁵ Begun in 1887, Roosevelt's Club continued to be influential in lobbying for wildlife legislation and imparting information to the public well into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. That the Boone and Crockett Club's convictions still remain relevant to this day attests to the innovativeness and far-sightedness of the club's founders, Grinnell and Roosevelt.

While reflecting upon President Roosevelt's role as a conservationist, Grinnell stated, "Roosevelt's services to science and conservation were many, but perhaps no single thing that he did ... had so far-reaching an effect as the establishment of the Boone and Crockett Club."⁹⁶ From the late nineteenth century to the present, the Boone and Crockett Club has continued to be a watch-dog and defender for the preservation of America's wildlife. The Club remains a powerful and respected presence in our legislative system; former President George W. Bush asked the Club to draft a wildlife conservationist agenda for his administration.⁹⁷ The Club also continues in its mission of educating the public, offering a whole range of learning opportunities from summer camps to educational grants. One of its conservation programs, named "Project WILD," instructs teachers, from kindergarten to high school, about various wildlife. In one

⁹⁴ Grinnell and Sheldon, *Hunting and Conservation*, 239-40.

⁹⁵ "Constructive Conservation of Game"

⁹⁶ Rattenbury, *Hunting of the American West*, 367.

⁹⁷ Boone and Crockett Club, http://www.boone-crockett.org/news/news_baier.asp?area=news (Accessed December 11, 2011).

program, “Project WILD About Elk,” teachers learn what an elk is, how they live, and what the future holds for the species.⁹⁸

In *Hunting and Conservation*, Grinnell reflected that because of government associations, agencies, and individuals devoted to preservation, “we see the dawning of a new day when ... the forest, the birds, and the animals so ruthlessly swept away in the past may be in a measure reestablished and, within proper limits, may be preserved for the benefit of future generations.” Roosevelt and Boone and Crockett Club members were harbingers of modern conservationism. Because of their steadfast adherence to their principles, today when we enter Yellowstone National Park, we are able to see the same majestic beauty, forest and wildlife that captivated Dr. F. V. Hayden over a century ago.

It was an impressive feat for President Roosevelt to preserve forests, monuments, and wildlife; it was an unprecedented feat in conservationism for him to found such a long-ranging and versatile institution that continues to protect the wildlife in the very reserves he established during his presidency. In fact, without the Yellowstone Park Protection Act, Roosevelt’s conservational efforts as President would have been ineffective, since the natural gems inside the Park would not be protected. Well before his presidency, Roosevelt founded a club that would end up protecting the forest reserves, national parks, and national monuments that he and his conservationist successors would establish for the benefit of America’s posterity. The Boone and Crockett consisted of members who recognized the importance of preserving America’s heritage. Amazingly, they possessed enough foresight to know what their posterity would lack if America’s natural treasures, like the buffalo, no longer existed. The reason we are able to admire these icons of the American West today is due largely to the unrecognized band of

⁹⁸ Boone and Crockett Club, http://www.boone-crockett.org/news/news_baier.asp?area=news (Accessed December 11, 2011).

hunters who possessed enough grit and stamina to stay in the saddle and not allow the bison to see their last sunset.

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